



Kingdom Rest: Sabbath as Resistance

(Mark 2:23-3:6)

Bottom Line: Sabbath is a means for us to resist the yoke of worldly pressures to constantly perform.

Have you ever had to say “no” to something because of your faith? What was it? How did others around you react?

When Jesus invites us into the Kingdom, He invites us into a different way of life, a different way of living. We are to be holy, which means to be “set apart.” This means that as we follow Jesus and become more like Him, we are going to grow more and more “at odds” with the world that we live in. As we’ve seen in many previous studies through Mark, Jesus was constantly going against the conventional customs and wisdom of His day, which angered many of the religious people of the day, but Jesus’ intent wasn’t to make anybody mad, He was showing us a better way of doing things. And in this account, we see Jesus showing us a better way to observe the Sabbath.

Read Mark 2:23-28. In your own words, how would you explain what Jesus meant when He said that “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath?”

The incident that Jesus refers to with King David is found in 1 Samuel 21:1-6, where David instructed his men to eat the showbread that was kept in the temple and was to be eaten only by the High Priest. Yet God did not condemn David for this, and neither did Jesus. This would have been a violation of ceremonial law, but Jesus uses this incident to show the Pharisees, and us, an important point about the Sabbath: that the priority of human need always outweighs the need for us to conform to ritual formalities. By eating the grain on the Sabbath, Jesus was protesting against the additional regulations that the Pharisees had tried to impose upon Him and His disciples.

Read Mark 3:1-6. How do we see the importance of human need being made a priority here?

“Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm? To save life or to kill?”, this question that Jesus posed proved how the Pharisees had taken things too far with their understanding of Sabbath restrictions. This no doubt made them angry and hurt their pride, which made them begin to plot to kill Jesus (v. 6). But here we see the same theme, Jesus understood that Sabbath was a means of resistance against undue regulations and commands. The Pharisees had placed so many regulations on the people regarding the Sabbath that the Sabbath had become a burden rather than rest. But this was never the intention of the Sabbath.

Read Exodus 20:8-11. What is the reason that God gives as to why the Jews should observe the Sabbath?

The Jews were to observe the Sabbath, meaning they should work six days and then rest on one, because of the pattern and example that God Himself had set for them. And because this pattern came from the Creator of everything, sabbath rest is a pattern that is instilled into the entire cosmos. Even the land, the very earth itself, was created to observe a kind of sabbath

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rest (Leviticus 25:3-4; it may be interesting to read this verse). So the reason we rest is because God set this pattern in motion in the act of creation, and it's therefore instilled *into* the creation. It is simply how God designed us, the earth, and the universe to function. But did you know that this command to observe Sabbath was given to the Israelites a *second* time but for a different reason?

Read Deuteronomy 5:12-15. What is the reason that God gives as to why they should observe the Sabbath? What sense can you make of this?

When the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, they were subject to backbreaking labor and were never allowed to rest, not even on the Sabbath. The connection that God is making here is that if the Israelites refuse to observe the Sabbath, they might as well be submitting themselves to the same yoke of slavery that they had in Egypt, where they were never allowed to rest. In this way, Sabbath is a form of resistance—resistance against the slavery they experienced in Egypt, resistance against the burdensome yoke that they were once submitted to. For us today, when we fail to take a day of rest, we're giving in to the world's idea that to be successful we have to be constantly doing. This is why so many of us feel so burned out all the time. By practicing Sabbath, we are resisting the worldly narrative that busyness is good, that continuous work will make us successful, that constant activity and movement and action is the new normal. And we're making a statement to the world that our success, our companies, our futures—they're all in God's hands, and we can trust Him to keep things moving even when we stop moving.

Jesus understood this. Jesus understood that the Sabbath was meant to be a gift to mankind, not a burden. It was meant to restore, refresh, and rejuvenate us, not ruin us.

How does our observance of Sabbath rest act as a form of resistance in the 21st Century? Resistance against what? What are we saying about God when we take a full day to rest from our labor and toil? How can you incorporate Sabbath into your weekly rhythm? If not a full day, what can you do?

Application: Read these aloud, using your discretion about which questions should be pondered and which questions should be discussed.

The practical observance of Sabbath by Christians today is not required of us, as this requirement has been fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ. But the author of Hebrews mentions that “there remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from His. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by...disobedience” (Hebrews 4:9-11). The Sabbath rest that the author of Hebrews is speaking of here is salvation. It’s through putting our trust in Christ that we can then truly rest from our works. We are no longer required to work for our salvation, we are no longer required to earn our entrance into the Kingdom of God. For those who trust in Christ, the work has been completed *for* them *by* Him. Have you trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and entered into this Sabbath rest?

Again, Sabbath is not required of us, but is instead a privilege that we get to enjoy. Jesus modeled it for us and if He needed to regularly rest from His work, then how much more do we!? If you already observe Sabbath rest, how can you make that time *more* restful,

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worshipful, and energizing? If you don't practice Sabbath, what is it that is keeping you from it? Do you lack trust in God that He can keep things going if you take your hands off of them? Do you value your work more than you value time of rest spent in the presence of God? What steps can you take to resist the yoke of bondage that our culture places on us and stand out from the crowd by choosing to rest rather than to work?